

Memories Prisoners

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Memories Prisoners

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I write for the pleasure it brings. It's fun. So, enjoy.

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"As memory may be a paradise from which we cannot be driven,
It may also be a hell from which we cannot escape."

~~ _John Lancaster Spalding_ ~~

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"MEMORIES PRISONERS"

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by Suzie ~~ July 1999

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Blair stumbled out of the trees, falling to his knees in the soft earth that was the shoulder of the road. His body ached, his head

hurt, and he was totally lost. Too exhausted to hold his head up, Blair let his chin fall against his chest. He closed his eyes and tried to catch his breath.

Blair finally brought his head up and looked at the two-lane road that stretched into darkness in either direction. _East, west, north, south?_ he wondered silently. _Where do I go from here?_

Standing on shaky legs, Blair looked left up the road again. He blinked as his eyes tried to focus on a bright object that appeared to be shining through the trees on the other side of the road. _The moon?_ Blair stared up at the sky and saw that the moon was directly overhead. Momentarily losing his balance, he took an awkward step back as he let his eyes be drawn back to the bright object. Slowly he realized that the *object* was a light. Maybe it was a phone.

Forcing his legs to move, Blair had taken two steps onto the pavement of the road when he heard the low rumble of an engine. With a gasp he looked to see a pair of headlights in the distance.

"OhmyGod!" Blair whispered, fear making his chest tingle as he frantically scrambled back into the trees to hide.

Jim paced the loft, feeling helpless and angry. He hadn't seen his friend and partner since he'd left the apartment they shared to go to the store early Friday evening. It was Blair's night to fix dinner and he'd wanted a few things for the meal he was going to prepare.

After waiting an hour, Jim called Blair's cell phone and got no answer. Jim was soon worried and had gone out to look for Blair. He found the car just two miles from home with a bag of groceries on the passenger seat. The gas tank was a little more than half full and the Volvo started without any problem. There was no sign of a struggle, and Blair's cell phone was on the seat next to the bag, with a fully charged battery. Jim spent another hour searching the streets before finally calling in a missing persons report.

That was three days ago. Jim had barely eaten, drunk way too much caffeine, and not slept at all.

Blair peered out of the trees and listened carefully until he could no longer hear the car. Then he jogged across the road and made his way toward the light while staying close to the trees. Relief flooded through Blair as he realized the light was an emergency call box.

"I need help," Blair said into the call box's receiver when the operator answered.

"What is the problem, sir?" a pleasant female voice asked.

"I am I'm not sure. I don't know where I am."

The operator heard the distress in Blair's voice and said, "It's all right. Can you read the numbers on the box you're calling from? That

will tell me where you are."

Blair saw a line printed on the door of the call box. "WA-46-983 â€| where am I?"

"You're on Highway 3, about fifty miles east of Cascade. Are you injured?"

"I â€| um â€|"

"Just stay where you are. I'm dispatching a police unit and medics to your location."

For some reason the thought of the police coming for him sent fear stabbing through him. "NO â€| please don't do that!"

"Sir, you obviously need help. Let me â€|," the voice said patiently.

"My name is Blair Sandburg and I work with the Cascade PD," Blair said in a rush. "Please call Detective James Ellison with Major Crimes. He'll come and get me."

"Detective James Ellison," she repeated as she tapped the name into her computer.

"Yes â€| please!?"

"All right, but I think I should send â€|"

"NO â€| please just call Detective Ellison and tell him where I am!"

"All right, I'm calling right now," the operator said, keeping her voice calm. "Just hold on for a moment."

Blair heard another car coming and panicked. "I can't!! Someone's coming â€| I have to hide!!" He hung up the phone and dashed back into the trees before the headlights were able to light the spot where Blair had been standing.

It was a little after midnight. Jim had been sitting in the dark, staring out the balcony doors just short of zoning when his sensitive ears heard the soft buzz the phone made just before it rang. He grabbed the phone as it began to ring. "Ellison!"

"This is Debby Canes with the Washington State Patrol, is this Detective James Ellison?"

"Yes, that's me."

"Do you know a Blair Sandburg?"

"Yes, I do. What's happened?" Jim asked, feeling a tight knot form in his stomach.

"He called from box WA-46-983, fifty miles east of Cascade on Highway 3. He seemed disorientated and didn't know where he was," Debby

explained.

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Fifty miles?!! "Is he injured?"

"I don't know. He didn't seem to be too sure of anything. I wanted to dispatch a police unit and medical aid to him, but he insisted that I call you instead. Then he panicked and said something about having to hide ... and the line went dead."

"Okay, I'm leaving now," Jim told her. "If he calls again, tell him I'm on my way. I should be there within an hour."

"Yes, sir. Should I dispatch medical?"

Jim thought for a moment, _There's no need to scare him more than he is by sending strangers after him. _"Have them stand by and if they're needed, I'll call."

"All right, I'll call and have them standing by."

Jim hung up the cordless phone, grabbed his cell phone off the counter, snatched his coat off the hook by the door, his keys out of the basket, and rushed out the door. Not taking the time to wait for the elevator, Jim took the stairs as he called his Captain at home.

"Hallumph?" answered a voice, heavy with sleep on the other end.

"Sorry to wake you, Simon, but Sandburg has been found. I'm going to go get him now."

"Is he all right?" Simon asked, yawning. "Where is he?"

"He's about an hour away on highway 3. I don't know what shape he's in," Jim answered, concern evident in his voice.

"Want me along?"

"Thanks, but I think I'd better go alone. I just thought you'd want to know."

"Okay, keep me informed."

"Yes, sir."

Jim pulled to the side of the road and stopped the truck next to call box WA-46-983. He opened the door and stepped out into the early morning silence. Extending his hearing to scan the area, Jim detected a frighteningly fast heartbeat just beyond the trees. Piggybacking his sight, he made out Blair's crouched form.

"Jim, is that you?" Blair asked whisper soft, knowing that if it was Jim, he would hear.

Jim stepped into the light cast by the truck's headlights. "Yes,

Blair, it's me. Come on out."

"Are you alone?" Blair asked in a slightly louder voice.

"I'm alone. It's safe."

Jim watched as Blair slowly stood and tentatively stepped out of his hiding place.

"Come on, Chief," Jim urged gently. "You're safe now."

Blair took a couple more steps then stopped and looked around nervously. "Turn the lights off â€¦ please."

Jim quickly walked back to the cab and turned out the headlights. As he turned back, he heard a shuffle of feet in the dirt and was nearly knocked down by the force of Blair's weight when the younger man wrapped himself tightly around his Blessed Protector.

Jim's arms automatically went around his shaking Guide in a snug embrace. "Shh, it's all right," he whispered soothingly as Blair sobbed quietly against him. "I've got you."

"I didn't know if you'd get the call â€¦ I asked them to call you." Blair's voice was muffled in Jim coat, his voice becoming raspy as he rambled on. "I didn't know where I was ... I ran and ran â€¦ but I didn't know where I was. I was so scared they'd find me â€¦ I didn't â€¦ I couldn't â€¦"

"Easy now, Chief," Jim said. "Take a deep breath." He gently pushed Blair back enough to look him over a bit. "Are you hurt? What happened?"

Blair took a deep breath, held it for a second, then let it out slowly. "I â€¦ I â€¦ don't know."

There was a purple bruise on Blair's left cheek and some small cuts and scrapes on his hands and fingers, but nothing serious. Jim could feel the violent shivers coursing through his partner's compact frame without his enhanced senses. He pulled off his coat and wrapped it around Blair's shoulders.

"Okay, let's get out of here," Jim said quietly as he helped Blair into the truck from the driver's side.

Blair silently slid across the seat and huddled there, pulling the slightly oversized coat around himself, as Jim got in and started the truck. As the truck pulled onto the road and made a u-turn to head back to Cascade, Blair curled up on the seat so his head rested against Jim's leg. The Sentinel let one large hand rest on his Guide's arm, moving it slowly between his shoulder and elbow in an effort to comfort.

Pulling up to the emergency entrance, Jim hopped out of the truck and hurried around to the other side, opening the door. "Come on, Chief, let's get you checked out," he said, gently pulling Blair up and out onto the walkway.

Blair leaned heavily into Jim, squinting at the brightly lit entrance. "Where are we?"

"Cascade General."

Blair tried to crawl back into the truck. "No â€¦ wanna go home."

Jim put an arm around his partner's shoulders and easily steered him towards the doors. "We'll go home in a little while. I just want to be sure that you're all right."

Blair didn't have the strength to argue and let himself be led inside. They stood at the reception desk, Jim's arm still around Blair, as he told the woman who he was and why he was there.

Blair's legs felt like rubber. "Jim â€¦ I need to sit down," he managed softly as his knees gave out.

Jim tightened his hold on his weakening friend and eased him down to sit on the floor. "Hang on, buddy."

The receptionist called for assistance, and a doctor and two nurses appeared with a gurney.

After helping get Blair onto the gurney, the doctor suggested that Jim go to the waiting room.

Blair latched onto Jim's arm as he was being wheeled away. "Jim â€¦"

Jim gave the doctor a pleading look as he took the trembling hand in his own. The doctor looked from Jim to Blair and gave a quick nod.

Jim followed as the two nurses wheeled Blair to an exam room. There he sat with his Guide, lightly rubbing the back of the hand he held, waiting for the doctor. As Blair's trembling increased, Jim asked a nurse for extra blankets and covered his Guide.

A short while later, the same man that had attended Blair at the receptionists desk entered the room and introduced himself as Dr Harris. "Okay, let's see what we have here," he said gently.

Jim helped Blair off with his shirt, and a darkened patch of skin caught his eye as Blair lay down on his side.

"What's this?" Jim questioned, getting the doctor's attention.

Dr. Harris examined the bruised wound carefully for a moment.

Jim watched as Blair flinched, and then winced, but otherwise remained silent.

"He was bitten," Dr. Harris declared.

Jim looked at the mark again. "It doesn't look like any animal â€¦"

"It's a human bite, Detective."

"What?!" Jim growled as he stared at the ugly black, red, and purple bruise on the back of Blair's right side. "A *human* bite?!" He brushed the hair back from Blair's face. "Chief, what happened?" Jim asked gently.

Blair lay on left side, his shivering having increased with the loss of both blankets and shirt. "I can't remember, Jim." He looked up at his Sentinel with eyes that were full of tears as Jim pulled the blankets up around him. "Can we go home now?"

"We'll need to get x-rays and draw some blood. Though there doesn't appear to be any broken skin, there are bigger infection and disease risks with human bites," Dr. Harris told Jim. "I'd like to keep him overnight for observation."

"I'm taking him home," Jim said in a no nonsense tone.

Dr. Harris sighed, "All right, I'll clean the wound and prescribe an antibiotic. He's exhausted and dehydrated," he explained, "obviously he's gone several days without food, so I suggest a soft diet for the next forty-eight hours and all the liquids you can get into him."

"What about his memory?"

"Mr. Sandburg has been through something very traumatizing. Sometimes these memories return within days. Sometimes it's months â€| even years â€| maybe not at all."

"I don't think I *want* to remember," Blair whispered.

Dr. Harris didn't hear Blair's words, but the Sentinel heard them as plain as if they'd been shouted.

Jim gently squeezed Blair's shoulder.

The sun was rising as Jim ushered Blair into the loft.

"You go get into bed," Jim told his exhausted partner. "I'll be there in a minute with your meds."

Blair was still leaning against Jim, he had no strength left to move on his own. "Wanna take a shower."

"Later, you need to rest now. You can shower later." Jim wrapped an arm around Blair's waist, realizing that he was going to have to help get the exhausted young man to the bedroom. He led Blair to his small downstairs bedroom and sat him on the bed. "Now, can you get undressed on your own?"

Blair managed a slow, deliberate nod.

"All right, I'll be back in a minute," Jim said, then left the room to go to the kitchen.

Less than a minute later, Jim returned with a glass of water, a glass of juice, and Blair's pills. He stepped into the room to discover Blair curled up on the bed, still fully clothed. With a fond sigh, Jim set the glasses and pills on the nightstand. He pulled off Blair's shoes and socks, then managed to get him out of his jeans.

Gently, Jim pulled Blair up to sit on the edge of the bed. "Sit up here a sec," he said when Blair protested with a groan and leaned into Jim's side.

Jim slipped Blair out of his coat and pulled his t-shirt over his head. Sitting on the bed next to his friend, Jim picked the two pills up off the nightstand. "Open up," he whispered to the limp figure leaning against him.

Blair complied all too readily for Jim's liking, but he popped the pills into Blair's mouth followed by the water glass held to his lips. Blair drank the water eagerly, draining the glass as Jim helped him hold it in shaky hands, then asked for more.

"Here, how about a swallow of juice?" Jim said, setting the empty glass aside before taking up the other.

Blair took a large gulp of the orange juice and started to take another, but Jim gently pulled the glass back.

"Slow down there, Chief. You'll make yourself sick if you drink too much at once."

Blair nodded and rested his head on Jim's shoulder. "I'm so thirsty."

"You're dehydrated, but making yourself sick will only make it worse." Jim set the half empty glass back on the nightstand and gently laid Blair down against the pillows. "You get some sleep now." He pulled the blankets out from under his already sleeping Guide, tucked his feet under, and pulled the covers up around his shoulders.

Jim took a minute to call and leave a message on Simon's office voice-mail, then headed upstairs to bed.

Several hours later, Jim woke slowly from the first sleep he'd had in days. He lay still, eyes closed, savoring the last vestiges of blessed unconsciousness, using his senses scan the loft as he always did. Sentinel hearing automatically going to the room below him to see if Blair was still sleeping.

A frown creased Jim's forehead as he realized that Blair wasn't in his room. Blue eyes sprang open as he sat up in bed, intent on locating his Guide. Rolling to his left, Jim thumped against a lump in the bed next to him. _What the hell?!_

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Blair's eyes opened and groggily looked up at Jim from under the quilted comforter he'd wrapped himself in. "Sorry â€¦ didn't mean to

wake you," he said, his voice rough with sleep.

Jim blinked and briefly wondered how Blair managed to get upstairs without him hearing. "It's okay, Chief," he smiled, knowing Blair had been there for some time. "You didn't wake me. What are you doing up here?"

"I woke up and didn't know where I was at first," Blair whispered, his eyes falling shut again. "I knew that if I woke up and saw you, I'd know I was home." _I'd know I was safe_.

Jim gently brushed the hair off Blair's cheek and felt the warmth of his skin. Already returning to the sanctuary of sleep, Blair sighed softly and snuggled down inside his comforter. Pushing himself back down under the covers, Jim again slept.

It was early afternoon when a faint, but familiar, odor awoke the Sentinel. He watched his Guide, sleeping peacefully, as he inhaled and quickly identified the smell. _Cigars_, Jim thought with a smile. Moving carefully so as not to wake Blair, he got out of bed and pulled on his robe as he went downstairs.

There was a single knock just before Jim opened the door. "Morning, Simon, come on in."

The Captain raised his eyebrows as he stepped past Jim into the loft. "Morning? It's nearly two o'clock."

Jim snorted, "Yeah, well it's always morning somewhere in the world."

Simon chuckled as he slipped off his overcoat and hung it beside the door. "How's Sandburg?"

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He's home. He's safe. "He's exhausted, dehydrated, slightly malnourished, bruised, bitten, and has no memory of what happened."

"Bitten?! Did I hear you right?!" Simon said louder than he'd intended.

"Shhh, he's still asleep," Jim said in a low voice. "Yeah, the doctor said it's a human bite."

"Good God, how bad?" Simon asked, horror and concern etched on his dark face.

"The bruise is ugly, but the skin wasn't broken."

Simon nodded. "You say he has no memory of any of it?"

Jim went to the kitchen to make coffee as Simon went into the living room.

"He says he can't remember." After the coffee was started, Jim joined the Captain and they sat down. "Actually, he said he doesn't want to

remember."

"PTSD?"

"Probably."

"You know we'll never find who took him if he can't remember what happened."

Jim nodded sullenly. His hearing caught a small sound from upstairs. "Blair's waking up â€¦ I'll be right back."

"Take your time," Simon said knowingly.

It wasn't the first time Blair had ended up sleeping upstairs. There had been cases in the past that had given the Police Observer nightmares. Blair seemed to migrate to where he felt safest when the dreams and memories got to be too much â€¦ and he always felt safest with Jim.

Jim took the stairs two at a time and quickly crossed the distance to sit on the bed next to the huddled figure still wrapped in the comforter. He gently squeezed Blair's shoulder and spoke softly, "Hey, Chief, time to wake up."

Blair moaned quietly and tried to push away from the hand. "Nooooo â€¦ don't â€¦"

Jim released Blair's shoulder and brushed the unruly curls away from his bruised cheek. "It's okay, Blair, open your eyes."

Blair's eyes snapped open and he gasped, "Jim!"

"Right here, buddy. Take it easy. You're safe."

The momentary terror that flashed through Blair's eyes was gone as soon as he recognized his Sentinel. "Jim â€¦ I â€¦ It was â€¦ Oh God â€¦"

"It was a dream, Blair."

"I was there again! There was â€¦ I â€¦"

"What? Do you remember something?" Jim urged gently.

Blair covered his face with his hands. "It was happening all over again â€¦ but now that I'm awake, I can't remember! Jim, what's wrong with me? Why can't I remember?" He was near tears.

Jim pulled Blair's hands away from his face. "It's all right, Chief. There's nothing wrong with you. You'll remember when you're ready."

"But it's three days out of my life!" Tears trickled out of the corners of Blair's eyes to disappear into his sideburns. "It's just a blank!"

"It's called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Do you know what that is?"

"It means I've repressed whatever happened to a point where my mind refuses to acknowledge it anymore."

"That's right," Jim nodded, letting go of Blair's hands as he felt him relax slightly. "Give yourself time. I'll bet you'll start remembering things within a week."

Blair swiped at his face with a corner of the comforter. "But what if I don't want to remember? What if I never â€|"

"Shhh â€| settle down, Chief," Jim soothed quietly. "Let's just give it a little time before we worry about that, okay?"

"Yeah â€| okay. You're right."

"Now, are you ready to get up and eat something?"

Blair nodded, "I'm starving â€| and I'm still thirsty."

"Simon's downstairs. Take your time and come down when you're ready."

A week passed and Blair still had no memory of what had happened to him. He had vivid dreams nightly, but when he woke up he could not remember them. Only that what happened in his dreams had really happened to him. Blair avoided discussing the incident. He hadn't driven his car. Blair had circled behind Jim to walk on his other side, seemingly to avoid the only other person on the sidewalk in several instances. There was a woman that was walking quickly towards them, and a young man with crew-cut hair, all relatively harmless people that caused his partner to seek out the Sentinel's protection. It was obvious to Jim that Blair didn't realize what he'd done, and Jim wasn't sure he should bring it to his friend's attention.

"What's the point of talking about what I can't remember?" Blair told Jim and Simon one day. "I just want to forget it and get on with life."

But Blair couldn't just **forget** that something happened to him ... something that scared him so bad he didn't really **want** to remember.

Jim watched silently as his friend avoided anything having to do with his disappearance. He noticed Blair's lack of concentration, as he seemed preoccupied with keeping an eye on his surroundings. Always looking up when anyone walked into Major Crimes or past the desk where he was working. Always being suspicious of anyone he didn't recognize. Needing to know where Jim was and tagging along when he left the bullpen.

Simon had noticed it too and had talked to Jim about getting Blair into see the station psychiatrist. Jim wanted to wait another week.

"All right," Simon had sighed. "But if the kid is no better by Monday, I'm making an appointment for him to see Dr. Crane. In the meantime, I think it would be best for both of you to stick around

the station for now."

Jim reluctantly agreed.

A week later, late Friday morning, Jim and Blair were the only ones in the bullpen when Simon stepped out of his office.

"Where is everybody?" the Captain scowled.

"Megan and Joel went to follow up on a lead for the case they're working on," Blair answered.

"Brown and Rafe are questioning witnesses on the Terry case," Jim added.

"Damn!" Simon said under his breath, then told the two men, "There's been a shooting at a house on Front Street."

"We'll take it," Jim said.

Simon sighed and looked over at Blair, "Are you sure?"

Blair nodded and smiled faintly, "I'm fine, sir."

"Guess I don't have a choice anyway." Simon handed the slip of paper with the address written on it to Jim. "Go ... keep me informed."

Jim pulled the truck up in front of the little house on Front Street that was part of a low-rent district. The older homes and yards were unkempt, with peeling paint, rotting wood siding, knee-deep grass, and weeds.

Jim noticed Blair's eyes darken with fear as he stared out at the house. "Do you want to wait here, Chief?" he asked carefully. "There's no need for you to go in."

Blair took a deep breath and turned towards Jim. "No â€¦ I'm fine. You may need me in there," he said, knowing how the sights and smells of a crime scene sometimes affected his Sentinel.

Jim simply nodded and got out of the truck. Blair followed and they walked up the short walkway to the porch and front door.

"What can you tell me?" Jim asked Officer Larry Rainey, who was standing just outside the door.

"Guy shot and killed his wife after a fight over some bills not getting paid," the officer said. "He says it was self defense, that she came after him with the gun and it went off while they were struggling."

"Coroner here yet?"

"Not yet, but he's on his way."

"Shooter still on the premises?"

"In the kitchen with Rollins and Marks. He doesn't seem too upset though. The body is in the living room."

Jim turned and gave Blair a reassuring look. "You're sure you want to do this?"

"I've seen dead bodies before, Jim," Blair replied simply.

"Okay â€¦ as long as you're feeling up to it."

Blair silently thanked Jim for his concern, then said, "I'm fine, big guy. Let's just get this over with."

Inside, the house was oppressively quiet. Another uniformed officer stood guard over the body of a woman lying dead in a pool of her own blood.

Blair stopped as soon as he saw the body. The woman had been shot twice, once in the chest and once in the abdomen. Blair's heartrate skyrocketed, and he struggled to keep his breathing under control. The police observer didn't really understand what was happening, he'd seen worse than this. Why was this one effecting him like this? Why was this crime scene making him feel frightened and panicky?

Jim didn't notice immediately. He was preoccupied with the crime scene as he stepped around the body and knelt beside her. That's when he heard Blair's gasping breath and thundering heartbeat. Looking up, Jim saw that all the color had drained from his partner's face, and he was beginning to tremble. "Blair?" he called, rising to his feet again. "What is it? What's wrong?"

Images flashed behind Blair's eyes, terrible visions of blood and death.

Jim saw movement out of the corner of his eye as the officer stepped forward. Glancing at the look of concern on the officer's face, Jim motioned to him to stay still. Then he stepped back around the body. "Take it easy, Chief, talk to me." Jim reached his hand out to Blair, hoping to steady his partner.

Blair's gaze shifted to Jim's face. "It was me, Jim," he said in a choked whisper, his hands pushing through his long hair.

"What, Blair? Tell me what's happening."

Blair stepped back away from Jim's hand. "There was so much blood, man â€¦ and I did it."

The look of shear horror on his friend's face made Jim's stomach twist as he realized what was happening. "It's going to be all right, buddy â€¦"

Blair backed out the door. "No â€¦ I did it! It's my fault!"

Standing outside, Officer Rainey was listening to the exchange and moved to restrain Blair by the arm, but wild eyes suddenly pinned the young officer. Blair turned and bolted off the porch.

"Sandburg!"

It was 10pm when Blair finally walked into the loft.

Jim was on the phone. "He just walked in, Simon, I'll call you back."

Blair dropped his keys in the basket and stood staring at the floor.

Jim quickly walked over and placed his hands on Blair's upper arms. "Are you all right?"

Blair slowly brought his head up and looked at Jim with red rimmed, sad eyes. Their eyes locked for a moment, then he collapsed against his Sentinel and began to sob uncontrollably.

Jim caught the smaller man easily and hugged him tightly to his chest. "It's going to be okay," Jim whispered as he guided Blair to the sofa.

Blair's hands clung to the front of Jim's shirt, bringing the big man down on the sofa with him. Jim did nothing to relinquish his hold on his friend. He simply sat down with Blair and began to rock slowly, holding the trembling and sobbing man close, feeling fists work convulsively at his shirt.

They were there a long time before Blair's gasping sobs diminished to quiet hitches in his breathing. Jim stopped rocking when he felt Blair's heart slow to a more normal beat, feeling the curls against his skin as he rested his chin on top of Blair's head. Blair's hands had calmed against Jim's chest.

"How are you doing, Chief," Jim whispered against the top of Blair's head.

"Lousy ... but better," Blair's muffled reply came against Jim's shoulder.

"You remembered what happened, didn't you?"

Blair nodded. "I'm sorry I panicked, Jim, but everything came back in such a rush. It felt like I was there ... reliving in all over again."

"Shhh, it's okay," Jim soothed. "Now that you remember what happened, we can deal with it."

Blair tensed, then slowly pushed back away from Jim. "You're going to hate me," Blair said softly as he pulled his knees up onto the couch and against his chest.

Jim frowned with the concern he was feeling. "Why would I hate you, Blair?"

"Because ... because I ...," Blair tried, but the words wouldn't come out. "You're going to hate me ... then arrest me."

"Hold on, Chief. Whatever you did, you did with good reason." Jim got up and went to the kitchen. "Start at the beginning and tell me what you remember."

Blair sniffled and let his forehead rest against his knees. After a minute he felt Jim's hand on the back of his neck, and he looked up to see a large glass of juice held out to him.

"You left here to go to the grocery store. What happened?" Jim urged gently.

Blair took the glass of orange juice and took a swallow. "I was on my way home when I saw a car on the side of road with its hood up. There was a woman standing next to it looking lost and in tears. I thought if nothing else I could at least call a tow truck for her or something."

Jim stood and went back to the kitchen. Blair needed food.

"I pulled over and got out of my car. She was really upset ... saying that her husband was going to kill her because the car broke down. I asked her if I could call someone for her and she said that if I could just look at the engine, that maybe I could find what was wrong and fix it so she could go home." Blair sighed, "Well, you know how good I am with cars, but I thought I could at least look at it."

Jim listened intently as he started the soup.

Blair took another drink of his juice then continued. "I was leaning over looking at the engine when this beat-up VW van pulled up. Before I could even turn around, someone had grabbed me. I tried to get away, but there were three of them and they had me tied up in no time at all."

"Did you get a good look at them?" Jim asked.

Blair nodded, "Yeah ... but it doesn't matter."

Jim eyed his young friend across the room, "Why doesn't it matter?"

Hesitating, Blair swallowed hard and turned away. Jim heard his heartrate and respiration increase dramatically.

"Blair?"

Blair's mouth opened and closed several times before the words came out, "They're â€¦ dead ... all four of them."

"Four? I thought you said there were three?"

"There were three men in the van. I found out later that the woman was with them too."

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*You're going to hate me ... then arrest me* Jim heard Blair's words repeated in his head. He turned the burner under the pot of soup off and went back to sit with Blair. "How did they die, Chief?"

Jim asked.

"They ... um ... took me to a cabin. They kept me in a locked room." Blair stood and began to pace the living room. "I tried to listen through the door to what they were saying, but after a while I gave up. I ended up falling asleep on a cot that was there." He stopped in front of the balcony window and stared out, his voice dropping to just above a whisper. "It was in the morning when â€| when â€| "

After a minute of silence, Jim moved up behind Blair. "What happened?" he asked quietly.

Blair wrapped his arms around himself and drew in a shuddering breath. "One of the guys came in and led me out into the living room area. He was tying my hands in front of me, but he wasn't really paying attention â€| so I hit him. He went down, but I couldn't get to the door. I managed to get the table between them and me."

Jim squeezed Blair's shoulders, reassuring his partner of his support.

"There were guns laid out on the table and I grabbed one. They thought it was funny and picked up the other guns from the table. One of them dared me to shoot." Blair was beginning to tremble. "It was a stand off â€| "

Jim gently rubbed Blair's back.

"Everything happened so fast. One of them charged at me and I â€| the bullet hit him in the chest!" Blair's trembling was becoming more pronounced. "They stood there for a second ... like they couldn't believe I'd actually done it. Hell, *I* couldn't believe I'd actually done it! Then â€| they were coming at me! They had guns, Jim! I didn't have a choice, did I?! I mean they were bringing their weapons up to shoot me!"

Jim's arms went around Blair from behind. "It was self-defense, Chief."

"Then the woman â€| oh, man, was *she* pissed! She came at me with her fists â€| screaming like a banshee â€| and I tried to do everything I could not to hurt her. She started throwing things at me â€| anything she could get her hands on! Something hit me in the face and stunned me. The next thing I know, she's flying tackled me and we're both on the floor!" Blair gestured with his hands even though Jim had his arms pinned to his sides. "I managed to kick her off and I was trying to reach the gun, which I dropped when we fell, when she jumped on me and bit me!" He absently reached across himself with his left hand to rub at the still fading bruise. "Then she came up with a gun and I guess I reached the one that I dropped and I â€| I â€| Jim â€| I killed them!" Blair said, his voice rising into hysterics. "I didn't want to ... but I shot them and â€| "

"Blair," Jim said forcefully, turning his partner around to face him. "It was self-defensive. You were the victim â€| not them!"

Blair pulled away from his friend in horror. "Oh God!" His knees buckled. "What have I done!"

Jim caught Blair and eased down to the floor with him. "You did what was necessary," Jim whispered sadly, knowing it wasn't going to help his partner feel any better. "If you hadn't, they would have killed you."

They sat silently on the floor. The Sentinel holding his Guide and sharing his pain.

Finally, when Jim felt Blair had calmed down a bit, he asked, "What happened next?"

Blair sighed and pushed himself upright, crossing his legs in front of him. "I don't know how long I stood there. I think I blacked out or something. I remember seeing the blood ... noticing it for the first time, then I just dropped the gun and ran." He looked at Jim sitting in front of him. "I didn't pay any attention to where I was or where I was going ... I just had to get out of there."

"That's understandable."

"I just kept running until it got too dark to see and I collapsed. I guess I slept ... or maybe passed out. When it got light enough to see again, I kept going until I reached the highway and found that phone." Blair turned and stared at the dark sky through the window. "I kept thinking they would find me. I knew they were all dead, but I still had to hide every time I heard a car. I was afraid of the light ... afraid they'd see me and come after me." After a moment's silence he looked back at Jim and choked out, "You must hate me."

"I don't hate you."

If there had been any tears left in Blair to shed, he would have shed them then. "But I killed four people and I hate myself."

Jim gently grasped Blair's arms and brought them both to their feet. "What you did was an act of self-preservation. *Anyone* in the same position would have reacted the same way. I have no reason to hate you, Chief, and you have no reason to hate yourself."

"But I killed them! I killed them and ran away."

Jim pulled Blair into his side as he led the distraught man to the dining table. "I want you to eat something and then try to get some sleep, okay?"

"Not hungry."

"Just a little soup. You need it."

Blair slid silently into the chair and waited for Jim to set the bowl in front of him. He ate, not tasting any of it, and drank another glass juice to satisfy his friend.

"Ready for bed?" Jim asked, seeing the exhaustion plainly on Blair's pale face.

"Not sleepy."

Jim smiled faintly as Blair forced his eyes to stay open. "Yes you are. Do you want to sleep upstairs so you're not alone?"

Blair sighed, "No â€¦ I'll be okay."

"Are you sure?"

Blair nodded as he stood and shuffled off to the bathroom.

Jim busied himself with the dishes as he listened to Blair prepare for bed. Only when he heard the soft creak of the bed in Blair's room, did he go the phone. It was late, but Jim wanted to let the Captain know that Blair was safe. He knew Simon would be waiting for the call.

After Jim gave the Captain the highlights of Blair's story, Simon said, "Stay home tomorrow. Don't leave him alone."

"I hadn't planned to leave him alone, sir," Jim replied, feeling indignant that Simon thought it necessary to mention it.

"I'll be by tomorrow to get a statement."

Jim hung up the receiver and turned at the sound of Blair's bedroom door.

Blair stood for a moment in the doorway. His sweatpants, T-shirt, comforter wrapped about his shoulders, and pale, drawn face made Jim's heart constrict with emotion.

"Jim â€¦ I â€¦," Blair began softly, taking several tentative steps toward the big man.

"It's okay, Chief. Let's go to bed," Jim said, putting an arm around Blair's shoulders and guiding him toward the stairs.

After a restless night, Blair felt tired and despondent, and said little. He showered when Jim suggested it, he ate the food that was put in front of him, and he drank what Jim gave him.

Jim saw the depression in his friend, the light in Blair's usually sparkling blue eyes was gone. He dragged himself around the loft listlessly or slept on the sofa. Jim didn't know what to do. There had to be a way to convince Blair that the deaths of those people were not his fault. It had been self-defense.

Simon arrived a little past 10am, tape recorder in hand. Blair managed to get through an abbreviated and less emotional version of his kidnapping and subsequent ordeal. He gave Simon the facts and details as the Captain questioned him.

Simon reached over and clicked off the recorder that sat on the coffee table. He studied Blair for several moments, then said, "Now that you've remembered what happened, do you think you could lead us to that cabin?"

Blair had a stricken look on his face. "I can't go back there."

Jim knew this was coming. He knew that if Blair *could* remember the

way to the cabin, they would need to check for the bodies. Sitting down on the sofa next to Blair, Jim asked, "If you remember the way, we're going to have go there, Chief."

Blair sat, staring at his lap.

"Can you lead us to the cabin?" Jim asked quietly.

Blair finally nodded. "I think I can get into the general area, but I'm not sure if I can to the cabin itself. It was pretty far back and I don't think we took a road to get there."

"Okay, go change your clothes."

"N-now â€¦ you want to do it now?" Blair shuddered, his voice pitched slightly higher as his panic rose.

"Are you sure this is a good idea, Jim?" Simon asked, watching Blair's reaction.

"The sooner we get this over with, the sooner life gets back to normal," Jim said. He placed a protective arm around his best friend. "We'll be there with you â€¦ all the way."

"I-I â€¦ I won't go inside," Blair said, shaking his head.

"You won't need to. Just get us to the cabin, and Simon and I will take care of the rest."

With Blair sitting between him and Simon, Jim drove to the place where he had found Blair's car. Blair was able to remember much of what he'd seen from his seat in the back of the old VW van. He led them out of Cascade and east up Highway 3 for nearly a hundred miles.

"There should be a turn off along here somewhere," Blair told the two men in the truck with him. "I just don't know where. It didn't look like a road and I didn't really *see* it before we turned."

Jim turned at every place that vaguely resembled a track or trail back into the forest. On the fourth attempt, the grooved tracks led through a twisted maze of trees and underbrush that took them a good fifty miles into the forested backcountry. It was rough, and Jim wished he'd had a four-wheel drive. Even the old logging roads they took when they went camping weren't this bad.

Finally, a cabin loomed out of the trees in front of them. An old, beat-up Volkswagen van was parked against one side under a makeshift carport next to the cabin.

Jim stopped the truck, listening to sudden acceleration of Blair heartrate and respiration. "Is this it, Chief?"

Blair nodded, tension making muscles tight to the point of being painful.

Jim pulled the truck up in front of the cabin. Even with the front door closed, the stench of death reached the Sentinel's sensitive

nose as he stepped out of the vehicle. It reminded him that it had been weeks since the incident occurred. "Stay here, Blair," Jim said. "If you need me, just call. I'll hear you."

Blair nodded silently, his eyes wide with nervous fear.

Simon left the truck and, together with Jim, went to the front door of the cabin.

The sickening smell of decomposing flesh was strong enough to get Simon's attention as they approached the cabin. Jim had dialed his sense of smell all the way down.

"Is anyone alive in there, Jim?" Simon asked, knowing the answer even as they stood outside on either side of the door.

Jim listened for a moment then shook his head. Then with a single fierce kick, the door slammed open.

Simon grabbed for the door as it bounced back and turned the doorknob, saying, "Jim, it was open."

Jim shrugged, "Yeah, but I feel better."

Inside, the scene was gruesome. There were four bodies, three men and a woman, all dead from gunshot wounds. Jim and Simon moved about the cabin quietly, checking the two small rooms and the bathroom. Jim looked into the room with the small cot that sat in the corner. He eyed the boarded up windows and felt anger well up inside at the thought of Blair being locked in the room, huddled on the cot in the corner.

After their check of the cabin, Simon took his cell phone out of a coat pocket and called in what they'd found.

Outside, Blair was becoming increasingly nervous at the silence. Other than a few birds singing in the trees, there was no sound. He wondered what was going on inside the cabin; Jim and Simon seemed to have been in there an awfully long time.

Pushing open the passenger side door, Blair slid out of the truck. He swallowed hard as he stared at the door of the cabin as it swung loosely on its broken hinges. What was happening in there? What did Jim and Simon find? A pungent odor drifted to him as a slight breeze rustled the leaves above him.

He started when Blair thought he heard voices. Not Jim's or Simon's, but the voices he'd heard in the cabin the morning after he'd been kidnapped. Blair's heartrate and breathing quickened dramatically, and he broke into a cold sweat. Images flashed behind his eyes and he gasped at the bloody scenes playing in his mind. They seemed so real â€| it was happening all over again. _Oh my God!_
"Jim!"

Jim heard the sudden acceleration of his Guide's heart and hurried through the cabin to the front door. He was in time to hear Blair call out his name and see him sink to his knees, bending forward with his arms wrapped around his stomach as if in pain.

"Blair?!" Jim cried as he ran to his friend's side. He knelt down and pulled Blair up to face him, "Blair, what is it?!"

Blair looked at Jim, horror reflected in his eyes. "NOOOO!!" he screamed as he began to struggle against Jim's hold.

Simon heard the commotion outside and arrived at the door in time to see Blair kick Jim hard in the stomach then scramble to his feet and run into the trees. _Oh Christ!_ he thought as he ran forward. "Jim, what the hell happened?" he asked, helping the Detective to his feet.

"He's having ... a flashback," Jim answered, gasping from the blow Blair had delivered. "I'm going after him."

"Go! NOW!"

Blair ran headlong into the forest. He wondered if he'd really killed the people in the cabin, or if he just wounded them and they would be coming after him. He couldn't let them catch him.

Images kept flashing through Blair's mind. That first shot that hit the man in the chest. He could still feel the recoil from the gun, still see the look of surprised shock on the guy's face as he jerked back a step then collapsed. There was shouting, more bullets, more blood. The woman lying dead across his legs. Panic ... run ... hide ... call Jim!

Suddenly, something hit him hard from behind, and he fell forward into the dirt and leaves littering the ground. Jim quickly turned the now inert form of his friend onto his back. Huge dark eyes stared up at him, but did not seem to see him.

"Blair?" Jim called quietly. "Hey, buddy, are you all right?"

Blair didn't answer. He lay limply, chest heaving, breathing ragged, eyes staring at nothing.

Jim pulled Blair up into his arms and cradled him against his chest. "Listen to my voice, Blair," he pleaded. "It's going to be okay, none of this was your fault. I need you to come back to me, Chief ... please." Jim began rocking, pleading for a response from the man he held ... his Guide, his best friend.

After several minutes, Blair's eyes focused on Jim's face and he blinked. "Jim? What's going on? What happened?"

Jim sighed in relief at the sound of Blair's voice and the fact that his Guide recognized him.

Blair looked around, confused. "Where are we?"

Jim frowned worriedly as he helped Blair sit up on his own. "What's

the last thing you remember?"

Blair thought for a moment then said, "I needed some things from the grocery store to make dinner ..."

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Epilogue

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Kevin Tolkin had been the star pitcher for Rainier University's baseball team. After an investigation, it was discovered that Blair had proctored and graded a test for another TA who had been sick. The grade that Blair had given Kevin was not enough to get his grade point average up and let him play in the State Championship game.

Without their star pitcher, Rainer's team lost. Kevin, along with teammates Michael Titan and Mark Richards, and Mark's girlfriend, Rachel, decided to take the loss out on Blair. It wasn't known whether or not they had actually planned to kill him, or just scare him.

Jim was convinced that Blair would have been murdered and his body left in the cabin, probably never to be found. "Why else would they be so unconcerned about Blair seeing where the cabin was?" Jim had said to Simon when the case file was signed off.

Blair's memories of his kidnapping and the shooting were gone again, and Jim was hoping they would stay that way this time. Since Blair couldn't remember what happened, and there were obvious signs of the kidnapping and struggle at the cabin, along with his taped statement, the Captain of Major Crimes, Cascade's Cop of the Year, and a few called in favors, let them forgo questioning Blair a second time.

"Jim, you and Simon told me that I was kidnapped and that some people died. But will I ever remember what happened?" Blair asked days later, from his place on the sofa as he graded papers.

"I don't know, Chief ... maybe," Jim replied as he sat next to his friend.

"I mean I don't even remember ever seeing Kevin Tolkin before."

"Does it bother you that you can't remember?"

Blair shrugged. "In a way it bothers me but, no, not really. There's a little voice in me telling me I'm better off not knowing the details. It's just a little strange to have that time missing ... just a blank in the back of my head."

—

Listen to that little voice, buddy. Jim turned to look at Blair, into blue eyes that had their sparkle back, a face that had its color back. "To be honest, I hope you never do remember what happened. But if you do ... you're going to have to deal with it and not lock it away inside."

Blair nodded, "Yeah, I know. And I know I'll be able to deal with it so long as you're here to support me."

"Support you? Damn it, Blair, I'll sit and hold your hand while you sleep upstairs if that's what it takes. You know I'm **always** here for you. And so is Simon."

Blair blushed as he smiled, "Thanks, big guy. Now how 'bout I fix dinner?"

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End  
file.